

February 23, 2023

**Lisa Cacace**

Appropriations Committee

H.B. No. 6659 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2025,  
AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR. (Elementary and Secondary Education Agencies)

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Berthel, Representative Nuccio, and esteemed Connecticut General Assembly members of the Appropriations Committee, my name **Lisa Cacace**, and I am a Food Service Manager at a high school from Cromwell and I am writing today to speak on the budget for fiscal years 24 and 25, concerning elementary and secondary education. I respectfully request that funding for no-cost school meals for all is included. It is important that all schools that participate in the national school lunch program get funding for the cost of food that the USDA does not reimburse.

During the pandemic we fed hundreds of children each day that may or may not have been in a financial need but were definitely in need of something that was “normal” for them. The past few years have changed all of us and providing something to the kids that was part of the routine was so needed. I cannot tell you how many parents would call, email or post on social media how appreciated it was to do this for their children.

Since going back to paid lunches, our number of students getting lunch has significantly decreased. Many students sit in the Cafeteria with no food, no drink. Even the students who qualify for free meals do not take them, there is still a stigma attached to free food. How are they expected to learn and function appropriately without nourishment? The guidelines for the Free/Reduced Program are seriously lacking. We mandate the children be in school for a certain number of hours, 180+ days a year. Why are we not providing them with meals? We can provide chromebooks and internet access but not a basic necessity?

- o Hungry kids can't learn*
- o School meals for all mean that all kids get a nutritious meal that many will not get unless at school – it helps their physical health*
- o Helps my family pay for food (food inflation), can't afford meals, feel confident my child is eating*
- o Less stress at home for families*
- o When all students get school meals, there is less absenteeism, learning is easier, and there isn't any stigma about who can or cannot afford the meal.*
- o We really shouldn't be putting money into education while students are hungry and not ready to learn. It is not money well spent.*

*Many families in Connecticut relied on these meals during the pandemic, and now, when food costs are so high, and families are just making it, we have to continue them.*

I urge you to support this very needed program for our kids, their families, and their success.

Thank you

Lisa Cacace

